United Nations A/69/880–S/2015/271

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
23 April 2015

Original: English

General Assembly
Sixty-ninth session
Agenda item 14
Culture of peace

Security Council
Seventieth year

Letter dated 21 April 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing with regard to the letter of the Permanent Representative of Armenia dated 17 April 2015 (A/69/876-S/2015/261).

The letter and the attached "declaration" reflect an approach aimed at spurring confrontation and fuelling hatred. Indeed, the letter and its attached document contain numerous falsifications of present, historical and legal facts, which are clearly aimed at vilifying Turkey. The "declaration" goes as far as implying irredentist claims. It is obvious that nothing in the letter and the attached document is of the nature to contribute to establishing good-neighbourly relations between Turkey and Armenia.

Turkey's vision is based on creating a positive agenda, aimed at deriving friendship rather than enmity from history. Turkey sincerely shares the suffering of the Armenians in that tragic episode of history. Today, we remember with respect the innocent Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives during those tumultuous years and offer our deep condolences to their descendants.

In the last years of the Ottoman Empire, all of us, Turks, Armenians and many others, suffered immensely. In such a context, we are not attempting to discriminate between pains and impose one-sided narratives on others, and we expect the same approach in order not to create obstacles for reconciliation. It is important for this period to be understood in its entirety through impartial academic study, so that the right lessons may be drawn, a just memory can be reached and the memory of the lives lost can be properly respected. It is with this constructive spirit that we have proposed the establishment of a joint historical commission, which remains on the table.

Turkey's constructive and humane stance was outlined in the message by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of the Republic of Turkey, on 23 April 2014, when he was the Prime Minister, and in the statements by Ahmet Davutoğlu, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, on 20 January 2015 on the occasion of the commemoration of Hrant Dink and, most recently, on 20 April 2015. The texts of the aforementioned message and statements are attached herewith (see annexes).

Please recycle

Turkey will continue its efforts to establish an open dialogue with Armenia. We are determined to take further steps towards the normalization of relations between the two nations. We aspire to a common future, while paying respect to history.

I would be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 14, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Y. Halit **Çevik**
Permanent Representative

Annex I to the letter dated 21 April 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Message of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, on the events of 1915

23 April 2014

The 24th of April carries a particular significance for our Armenian citizens and for all Armenians around the world and provides a valuable opportunity to share opinions freely on a historical matter.

It is indisputable that the last years of the Ottoman Empire were a difficult period, full of suffering for Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Armenian and millions of other Ottoman citizens, regardless of their religion or ethnic origin.

Any conscientious, fair and humanistic approach to these issues requires an understanding of all the sufferings endured in this period, without discriminating as to religion or ethnicity.

Certainly, neither constructing hierarchies of pain nor comparing and contrasting suffering carry any meaning for those who experienced this pain themselves.

As a Turkish proverb goes, "Fire burns the place where it falls.".

It is a duty of humanity to acknowledge that Armenians remember the suffering experienced in that period, just like every other citizen of the Ottoman Empire.

In Turkey, expressing different opinions and thoughts freely on the events of 1915 is the requirement of a pluralistic perspective as well as of a culture of democracy and modernity.

Some may perceive this climate of freedom in Turkey as an opportunity to express accusatory, offensive and even provocative assertions and allegations.

Even so, if this will enable us to better understand historical issues with their legal aspects and to transform resentment into friendship again, it is natural to approach different discourses with empathy and tolerance and expect a similar attitude from all sides.

The Republic of Turkey will continue to approach every idea with dignity, in line with the universal values of law.

Nevertheless, using the events of 1915 as an excuse for hostility against Turkey and turning this issue into a matter of political conflict are inadmissible.

The incidents of the First World War are our shared pain. To evaluate this painful period of history through a perspective of just memory is a humane and scholarly responsibility.

Millions of people of all religions and ethnicities lost their lives in the First World War. Having experienced events that had inhumane consequences, such as relocation, during the First World War, should not prevent Turks and Armenians

from establishing compassion and mutually humane attitudes among and towards one another.

In today's world, deriving enmity from history and creating new antagonisms are neither acceptable nor useful for building a common future.

The spirit of the age necessitates dialogue despite differences, understanding by heeding others, evaluating means for compromise, denouncing hatred and praising respect and tolerance.

With this understanding, we, as the Turkish Republic, have called for the establishment of a joint historical commission in order to study the events of 1915 in a scholarly manner. This call remains valid. Scholarly research to be carried out by Turkish, Armenian and international historians would play a significant role in shedding light on the events of 1915 and an accurate understanding of history.

It is with this understanding that we have opened our archives to all researchers. Today, hundreds of thousands of documents in our archives are at the service of historians.

Looking to the future with confidence, Turkey has always supported scholarly and comprehensive studies for an accurate understanding of history. The people of Anatolia, who lived together for centuries regardless of their different ethnic and religious origins, have established common values in every field from art to diplomacy and from state administration to commerce. Today, they continue to have the same ability to create a new future.

It is our hope and belief that the peoples of an ancient and unique geography, who share similar customs and manners, will be able to talk to each other about the past with maturity and to remember together their losses in a decent manner. And it is with this hope and belief that we wish that the Armenians who lost their lives in the context of the early twentieth century rest in peace, and we convey our condolences to their grandchildren.

Regardless of their ethnic or religious origins, we pay tribute, with compassion and respect, to all Ottoman citizens who lost their lives in the same period and under similar conditions.

Annex II to the letter dated 21 April 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement by the Prime Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu, on the commemoration of Hrant Dink

20 January 2015

It has now been eight years since Hrant Dink was taken from us. Throughout his life, he strived, mind, heart and soul, to shed light on one of the major issues that the Ottoman Empire passed down to the Republic of Turkey. We wish patience to Mr. Dink's bereaved family and all those who held him dear.

Hrant Dink was an invaluable Anatolian intellectual who, without compromising either his Armenian heritage or his loyalty to Turkey, sought to help to find the ways and means through which Turks and Armenians may build a common future. As someone who personified Turkish-Armenian friendship, he worked selflessly and gave his all, so that the bonds of an historic coexistence could be remembered and the deep-rooted suffering overcome. As we commemorate the anniversary of his demise, and guided by the seeds of friendship he sowed, we wish to open new paths into hearts and minds.

With this understanding, we call upon all Armenians, and invite all those who believe in Turkish-Armenian friendship, to contribute to a new beginning:

Having already underscored the inhumane consequences of the relocation policies essentially enforced under wartime circumstances, including that of 1915, Turkey shares the suffering of Armenians and, with patience and resolve, is endeavouring to re-establish empathy between the two peoples. Our message of condolence of 23 April 2014, which included elements of how, primarily through dialogue, we may together bring an end to the enmity that has kept our relations captive, was a testament to this determination. Only by breaking taboos can we hope to begin addressing the great trauma that froze time in 1915. For its part, Turkey has transcended this critical threshold and relinquished the generalizations and stereotypical assertions of the past.

There is every reason to believe that these two ancient nations can demonstrate the wisdom to understand each other and contemplate a future together. Having shared the same geography and a long history, it is only Turks and Armenians who can effectively address their issues together and work jointly to find ways forward. Fostering a sense of mutual trust and cooperation, getting reacquainted against the backdrop of an 800-years-old common history and promoting human interaction will be essential. Accordingly, we invite our Armenian friends to visit Turkey more often and do away with respective prejudices.

Furthermore, we will press ahead with resolve to give due recognition to the Armenian cultural heritage in Turkey and to those Armenian personalities who made inestimable contributions to Ottoman/Turkish culture.

Our desire to share in the pain, to heal the wounds and to re-establish friendships is sincere. Our course is set towards a horizon of friendship and peace.

Annex III to the letter dated 21 April 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement by Ahmet Davutoğlu, Prime Minister of Turkey, on the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives during the last years of the Ottoman Empire

20 April 2015

During the last years of the Ottoman Empire, a very large number of Ottoman citizens from different ethnic and religious backgrounds endured great suffering, leaving deep scars in their memories. They had all lived together for centuries in peace and harmony.

As descendants of nations with different ethnic and religious origins who endured these sufferings amid the conditions of the First World War, we understand what the Armenians feel. We remember with respect the innocent Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives and offer our deep condolences to their descendants.

It is both an historical and humane duty for Turkey to uphold the memory of Ottoman Armenians and the Armenian cultural heritage.

With this in mind, a religious ceremony will be held by the Armenian Patriarchate on 24 April 2015 and Ottoman Armenians will be remembered in Turkey, just as they will be across the world.

On this day, it would have been much more meaningful if Turkey and Armenia had been able to commemorate Ottoman Armenians together with a ceremony that befits both nations. This is what our President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, stated in his message on 23 April 2014, when he was the Prime Minister.

We believe that when history is no longer exploited for political purposes, such a mature and morally sound outcome can be attained.

Ancient Anatolian civilization teaches us to stand up for our history, to remember both our joys and pains, to heal our wounds collectively and to look to the future together.

As I declared in my message on 20 January 2015, on the anniversary of the passing away of Hrant Dink, "two ancient nations can demonstrate the wisdom to understand each other and to contemplate a future together".

As a consequence of our historical responsibilities and humane mission, and without making any distinction among those who suffered, we respectfully remember today all those who lost their lives in those events that transpired a century ago.

We also believe that, in order to ease the ongoing suffering, it is just as important to face the past with honesty, as it is to remember the deceased.

It is possible to establish the causes of what happened in World War One and those who were responsible for it.

However, laying all blame, through generalizations, on the Turkish nation by reducing everything to one word and to compound this with hate speech is both morally and legally problematic.

The scars left by the exile and massacres that Turkish and Muslim Ottomans were subjected to a century ago are still vivid in our minds today.

To ignore this fact and discriminate between pains suffered is as questionable historically as it is mistaken morally.

Indeed, recent years have shown that nothing can be achieved by trying to impose conflicting narratives upon one another.

In this context, the memories and convictions of all Ottoman citizens must be heard and respected.

To reach the truth, it is sufficient to attain a just memory, empathy, respectful language and a reasonable and objective way of looking at things.

In Turkey, every viewpoint is freely expressed and openly debated. Documents and knowledge of every kind can be investigated. By providing these means, Turkey is taking significant and positive steps towards the building of a common future.

As descendants of two ancient peoples who a hundred years ago shared the same destiny whether in joy or in sorrow, our common responsibility and calling today is to heal century-old wounds and re-establish our human ties once again.

Turkey will not remain indifferent to this responsibility and will continue to do its utmost for friendship and peace.

As such, we are calling on all third parties to adopt an approach based on just memory and a common peaceful future, rather than aggravating age old wounds.

It is with these feelings and thoughts that we once more commemorate with deep respect the Ottoman Armenians who lost their lives during the relocation in 1915 and we share in the grief of their children and grandchildren.